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Sixth Annual National Conference, POCPWI

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10-31-2001

# The Role of a Multicultural Facility in Enhancing Community Among Diverse Cultures

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Abele, Melissa; Claassen, Chandra; Helgeson, Kara; Majors, Becki; and Winkle, Rachelle, "The Role of a Multicultural Facility in Enhancing Community Among Diverse Cultures" (2001). *Sixth Annual National Conference, POCPWI*. Paper 10.
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# The Role of a Multicultural Facility in Enhancing Community Among Diverse Cultures

**Abstract**

*The results of a University of Nebraska-Lincoln study imply that education, representation and support are key to creating community among students of color. Through the exploration of students' responses, the presenters will identify what services, programming and space should be offered in a multicultural facility.*

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As the population continues to diversify, many institutions of higher education are facing the challenge of meeting the demands and needs of the students of color. Although many colleges and universities talk of diversifying their student bodies and faculties, the campuses are often unable to deal with the diversity effectively. Multicultural centers are one of the ways that institutions have tried to educate and celebrate diversity.

The purpose of this presentation is to identify, through the quantitative and qualitative methodology and results of a study conducted at a large land-grant institution, how a college or university can purposely create a sense of community among diverse cultures. The presenters will demonstrate how other institutions explore students' expectations for a multicultural center and share the outcomes of their study regarding what services, programming and physical space students desire the facilities to possess.

The study results are based on preliminary focus group discussions and responses to a telephone questionnaire. The focus group results include the comments of student leaders and other randomly selected students from a racially stratified sample, addressing the questions of purpose, functions, services, facility naming procedures and target population. Through the questionnaire, developed from focus group sessions, the opinions of 250 randomly selected students from a racially stratified sample address students' expectations for a multicultural facility. Presenters will discuss the major findings of the study and the implications of those results for other institutions of higher education.

In accordance with the definition prescribed by Malaney, Gilman & 0' Connor (1997), the term multicultural is "acceptance, respect, celebration, understanding and appreciation of differences between cultures." Supported by the findings of the study, students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) proclaim that the mission of a multicultural center is threefold:

- Education
- Representation
- Support

**Education**
Results demonstrate that although a great majority of students indicate that it is important to have a multicultural facility on campus to serve the university community, there is still a misperception that these buildings are only for students of color. This is supported by the fact that 25.9-percent of majority students, 43-percent of minority students and 37-percent of international students indicated that students of color were the primary target population for a multicultural facility. Therefore, a new multicultural facility must address community education in order to be successful in unifying a diverse population of students, faculty and community members.

**Representation**
The second most popular answer among students surveyed concerned the purpose of a multicultural center, which is to represent all cultures. This concept is supported by the frequency of requests for a multicultural art gallery and student organization office space.

**Support**
Academic services are highly desired by the students surveyed. Among minority students surveyed, 94.1% implied that counselors should be located within the facility. The research also suggests that over three-fourths of all respondents desire the inclusion of tutoring services. It can be concluded that in order for a cohesive community to exist, all levels of individual development such as academic and social, must be fulfilled.
In conclusion, a multicultural facility plays a key role in developing a sense of community among diverse cultures. By providing what the primary users of these facilities desire, community can intentionally be created. Multicultural facilities provide a place to educate students on the differences and similarities among cultures. Through programming, space allocations and academic services, students of color feel valued and supported by the University.

## Presenters
**Melissa Abele** is pursuing her Master of Education in Educational Administration, funded internship in Student Affairs Administration. She holds a Bachelor of Journalism from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and currently works as a graduate assistant at the UNL Office of Student Involvement. She coordinates service learning projects and is a native of Lincoln.

**Chandra Claassen** is pursuing her Master of Arts in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Student Affairs Administration. She holds a Bachelor of Education with an emphasis in Speech and Language Pathology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Currently working as a graduate assistant in the Office of Greek Affairs, she advises the Panhellenic Association. She is originally from Beatrice, Neb.

**Kara Helgeson** is pursuing her Master of Arts in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Student Affairs Administration. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Journalism from South Dakota State University in Brookings and is a native of Renner, S.D. She currently works as a graduate assistant for the Nebraska Union.

**Becki Majors** is pursuing her Master of Arts in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Student Affairs Administration. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communications from Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tenn. Originally from Chattanooga, Tenn., she now works as a Graduate Assistant in the UNL Office of Student Involvement where she advises the University Program Council.

**Rachelle Winkle** is pursuing her Master of Arts in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Student Affairs Administration. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies and Music from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She currently works as a graduate assistant in University Housing and coordinates service learning opportunities in the residence halls. She is a native of Chadron, Nebr.